Abstract: Examines the institutional situations of quality managers and their consequent ability to introduce innovation. Efforts of the quality managers in the construction industry to transform the industry into a more customer centered industry. Methodology; Forms of authority according to Weber; Transition of the culture of the industry; Recommendations.

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# "QUALITY MANAGERS, AUTHORITY AND LEADERSHIP"

## Contents

Some quality managers in the construction industry are attempting to institute total quality (TQ) management. Having established quality assurance (QA) systems, these managers have realized that the benefits to be gained from this bureaucratic approach are limited. They now aim to transform the culture of the industry, making it less adversarial and more customer centred. Using a sociological analysis based on the forms of legitimation of power identified by Max Weber, the institutional situation of quality managers is examined and their consequent ability to introduce innovation is assessed. Weber suggests that there are three forms of authority: traditional, charismatic and rational. These are considered in the light of some modem organization theory and with reference to the particular problem of cultural change. Managers have the best hope of successfully introducing TQ when they can establish a measure of charismatic authority. This is consistent with the centrality given to the concept of leadership by writers on TQ. The practicalities of this are investigated through an account of the process of setting up a quality circle.

Keywords: Quality management, change management, culture, charismatic authority, leadership

## Introduction

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# Quality managers, authority and leadership

STEVE McCABE,[1] JOHN ROOKE,[2] DAVID SEYMOUR[2] and
PHIL BROWN[3]

[1]*School of Building and Building Surveying, University of Central England, Birmingham, B42 2SU, UK*
[2]*School of Civil Engineering, University of Birmingham, B15 2TT, UK*
[3]*AMEC Construction (Southern) Ltd, UK*

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## Introduction

When Government and large clients began to promote quality assurance (QA) in the 1980s as a way of making the industry more efficient, one of the 'selling points' was that it contained nothing radically new. It was all about doing what best practice had always done with the sole difference that compliance with methods and procedures should be documented, so that an external auditor could assure himself that what a firm said was being done was in fact done. Frequently, this promise was taken at face value. QA systems were introduced to satisfy customer requirements. Many were sceptical about how useful they were actually going to be, and anticipated a flood of extra paperwork resulting from the imposed procedures. The people made responsible for setting up QA systems, therefore, tended to approach their task in a low key and at times an apologetic way. They could not be seen to be fundamentally threatening the time-honoured order of things.

Now, more than ten years on with competitive pressures still increasing, some people in the industry and many commentators on it are talking of the need for more fundamental changes. A few quality managers have taken up this challenge, attempting to implement the total quality (TQ) initiatives which have proved effective in manufacturing industry. The literature on such initiatives abounds with exhortations such as 'Get better or get beaten', pressing home to companies the message that unless they provide a superior product or service someone else will. The most fundamental element in these texts is the assertion that the 'Customer is king' (Bank, 1992). Their common objective is for radical improvement in what the customer gets by addressing the internal processes. This may require changes to plant and equipment, but the crucial point is stated repeatedly, that often what is more important is for management to analyse ways in which it can alter itself. This is often referred to as managing culture. Here is arguably the second vital element of TQ, the need for senior management to provide effec-

tive leadership which allows radical change to occur. Stahl (1955, p. 302) makes the point: 'Leadership is especially important in total quality organizations because TQ involves dramatic change to a new and improved way of doing business and managing operations. It takes influential leaders to cause followers to change.' Bell *et al.* (1994, p. 189) reinforce this, stating that: 'Recent evidence indicates that organizations succeed or fail in their desire for positive management in direct proportion to the amount of visible commitment from senior management level'. The focus on leadership is not a new phenomenon in terms of organizational analysis. It is over a decade since Hersey and Blanchard (1982, p. 109) argued: 'The successful organization has one major attribute that sets it apart from unsuccessful organizations: dynamic and effective leadership'.

This paper draws upon research with eighteen quality managers in large, regionally based construction firms. Of these, only eight could be said to be attempting the transition to TQ and an even smaller number appear to be making any progress. Those who are, clearly have a leadership role. They need to be able to convince employees of their organizations of the need to 'do things differently'. However, all eighteen are middle managers, who were originally given the task of implementing BS5750 as a temporary, or part time role. They feel that they are caught between a workforce who are both suspicious and reticent, and a senior management who, while giving lip-service to the need for quality initiatives, is unwilling to make the commitment required to implement them. We identify a consequent crisis of authority in current quality management.

Following a note on our methodology and data presentation, we introduce Max Weber's analysis of types of authority. In the following two sections, we present some findings on the introduction of QA and the attempted transition to TQ. We argue that, given this transition must be made using an adaptation of the conceptual framework developed by Weber (1947), we suggest that the transition might best be managed by quality managers who are able to establish a measure of charismatic authority. Following a brief review of the literature on leadership, we examine what charismatic (or transformational) leadership means for TQ managers on the ground.

## Methodology

The study reported here was carried out within the interpretative paradigm (Seymour and Rooke, 1995). This approach to management research is still relatively unknown among the construction management research community. In consequence, our presentation of data may be unfamiliar to some readers. Below, we will outline the main principles of this paradigm, describe our methods of collecting data and give some guidance as to how our findings should be read.

The interpretative paradigm is compared to the rationalist paradigm. This latter implies:

1. an analytical distinction between subjective experience and objective reality;
2. that explanations are concerned with the isolation of variables and the establishment of correlations between them and are causal in form; and thus
3. explanations consist of the creation of causal models, which represent simplified, but objectively correct representations of real life.

In contrast, the interpretative paradigm implies:

1. no stable distinction between objective and subjective accounts;
2. that explanations consist of conveying an understanding of the points of view of other people; and
3. explanations thus are not causal in form, but concerned with the investigation and explication of meaning.

A more detailed exposition of these differences and our reasons for choosing the interpretative approach can be found in Seymour and Rooke (1995).

In practice, this means that the data presented in interpretative studies are very different from those presented in rationalist ones: so different, in fact, that they might be unrecognizable as data to those whose thinking is firmly entrenched in the latter. The reader will find very few numbers in these pages. Still less, any use of statistical techniques. Instead, we will present ideas. We have learned these ideas from quality managers and our research has consisted of the learning of them. As far as possible we present them in the words of managers themselves.

Thus, the stories and comments related here should not be read as mere anecdotes, or as in any sense peripheral to the serious business of principled and systematic research. On the contrary, they represent a strong form of empirical data regarding the understanding which quality managers have about their situations and the methods they use for achieving their objectives within those situations. Moreover, these understandings, rooted as they are in the real life day-to-day experience of these managers, represent the unforgiving standard against which our own thinking as academics must and will be judged. The ubiquitous importance of ideas as the data of the thoroughgoing empirical study of human intercourse, has been

expressed well by Blumer (1969, our italics): 'Usually, most of the situations encountered by people in a given society are defined or "structured" by then in the same way. Through previous interaction they develop and acquire common understandings or definitions of how to act in this or that situation. *These common definitions enable people to act alike.* The common repetitive behaviour of people in such situations should not mislead the student into believing that no process of interpretation is in play; on the contrary, even though fixed, the actions of the participating people are constructed by them through a process of interpretation.' Managers' interpretations are, then, the empirical reality which we set out to study and which dictates the form of our data. It is these interpretations which, more immediately than any hypothesized causal variable, account for the manager's behaviour.

With this in mind, our methodology has been simply to talk to managers and, more importantly, to listen to what they have to say. We have done this in two ways, through interviews and through attendance at a self-organized forum of quality managers from different contractor organizations in the industry.

It should be clear that more formal methods of research would be wholly inappropriate to our objectives. In questionnaire surveys, for instance, most of the thinking necessarily is done in the design of the questionnaire, prior to its administration. Subsequently, it is simply a matter of counting the returns and performing statistical procedures upon them. Thus, the ideas contained in a questionnaire are the ideas of the researchers and not those of the managers researched. Such a procedure would fail our requirement for empirical reference.

A possible objection to our approach is that it does not demonstrate what statisticians term reliability: the assurance that a similar study among different quality managers would produce similar results. This is true. However, the problem of induction is logically insoluble. That is to say, there is no magic number of cases, where eighteen, or eighty, which can be sampled to give guaranteed reliability (Popper, 1959). The only method of achieving an entirely reliable picture of a population is to include the whole population in the sample. Nor is this merely a problem in logic: as political opinion polls continually demonstrate, even the most carefully chosen samples can be misleading.

Rather than reliability, therefore, we rely on resonance. That is to say, we do not rely on any claim to scientific proof of our findings, or recommendations. Rather, we ask our readers to judge the truth and the usefulness of our work against the background of their own experience. We feel this is the most honest way to present the findings of management research and suspect that it is, in practice, the way such research usually

is judged. This must be especially the case in a publication such as *Construction Management and Economics*, the readership of which is both managers and academics.

The other quality which statisticians look for in a study is validity. That is to say, that what is purported to have been measured has in fact been measured. Albeit that there is a total absence of measurement in our research, we feel that with respect to validity our approach has a distinct advantage over more formal methodologies. For what our empirical approach demands is that we recognize that the nature of our research subject is not measurable. Moreover, it is accessible through ordinary methods of social discourse. The ordinary methods by which we converse, discuss ideas and learn about the world are various and largely unstudied. They are, of course, effective. To abandon the flexible use of these methods, in order to don the straightjacket of a formal research method can only reduce that effectiveness. This is because there are no new methods of research. To return to the example of a questionnaire survey: the method employed is simply the everyday one of asking questions. By restricting the answers to replies on a printed form, a vast amount of data is eliminated from the research process. Thus, for instance, the mood and context, as conveyed by body language, tone of voice and subsidiary explanation are lost. So also is the opportunity to ask further questions to clarify or extend understanding. As noted above, the ability of managers to contribute their own ideas, indeed to point out new directions which research should take, is severely restricted.

## Weber's forms of legitimation

Weber distinguishes between three different types of authority: legal-rational, traditional and charismatic. It should be borne in mind that these distinctions, as well as those that follow, are in the nature of 'pure-types'. That is to say they represent analytical constructs, rather than empirical phenomena. In reality phenomena are almost certain to consist of a mixture of types, rather than any one in its pure form.

Legal-rational authority is based on a belief in the legitimacy of an impersonal order, the individual's authority being conferred upon him/her by the office which s/he holds. In Weber's view, this is the nature of authority in modern bureaucratic organizations.

Traditional authority, resting upon a belief in the established ways of doing things, may be summed up in the phrase, 'that's the way it's always been done'. In this form, the authority is vested in the individual, rather than the office. As Kennedy (1991, p. 300) observes: 'It has roots in feudal rights and duties but is not unknown in modern firms where patronage may

take the place of inheritance'. Traditional authority does not lend itself easily to change. When innovation is introduced, it tends to be justified as the revival of old ways which have fallen into disuse.

Charismatic authority rests upon exceptional personal qualities in the individual who, by force of personality, can inspire others to follow. Examples of charismatic figures are often found among religious leaders and politicians, such as Martin Luther King, Margaret Thatcher, Billy Graham or Arthur Scargill. On a more mundane level, each of us can be said to have some measure of charisma, some quality or qualities for which we are respected.

Each of the three types of authority forms the basis of a different type of organization. Traditional organization is in many ways the antithesis of capitalism. The latter is a form of rational organization which tends to overturn established ways of doing things in search of more efficient ways of generating profit. Charismatic organizations, built as they are upon the personal qualities of a leader, are necessarily unstable and short lived. They survive only because followers 'routinize' charismatic authority, transforming it into a traditional or rational mode.

In Weber's conception, legal-rational authority is a powerful force for change. The spread of modern institutions, such as the capitalist free market and the formal democratic process, are attributed to the success of the bureaucratic organization, premised upon legal-rational authority. Such authority is seen to provide the basis for forms of organization inherently more efficient than those of traditional society (Weber, 1947). A problem for Weber's analysis is that such a view of bureaucracy contradicts the more widely held one, of bureaucracy as slow moving, irrational and muddled. There are several possible reasons for this contradiction, and one is the tendency for rational action to degenerate into a traditional mode. What is done today because it is efficient, will be done tomorrow because 'that's the way it's always been done'. Weber did not address the problem of managing change in such degenerated legal-rational organizations.

We will be arguing that lack of senior management support deprives quality managers of the legal rational authority necessary to institute change, and suggesting that a measure of charismatic authority constitutes a viable alternative.

## The limitations of QA and the nature of rule governed activity

The original brief given to quality managers was relatively straightforward: to compile lists of current procedures, to be audited by themselves, or an accredited body such as the British Standards Institution (BSI). Essentially, their priority was to 'get the plaque on the wall': to obtain BSI approval, which could then be used as a selling point to clients. Their authority for this task had a clear legal-rational legitimation: a quality system was necessary in order to win contracts. The approach was fundamentally bureaucratic, i.e. to lay down rules for procedures which would be enforced through periodic checks. All the quality managers in the study argued that the bureaucratic approach has delivered benefits. One told us, for example: 'Before we had QA there was nothing. We had certain systems of operation, but not in a coordinated way. What I believe QA is, is a disciplined approach to what we do. I appreciate that people say, "I do my job properly, I don't need to follow procedures." Well, my reply is, "What about all the cock-ups made in the past?" There is undoubtedly a need for us to get our act together as an industry and QA has certainly helped this company'. Another was able to point to much more specific benefits: 'Before its implementation, each year we used to knock out a couple of thousand square metres of concrete, because it was in the wrong place, or of incorrect dimensions ... Now we knock out maybe a couple of dozen metres'.

The 'quality manual' also has a role in training. We were told: 'In the old days you put the young guys out with the older blokes, to pick up best practice. Now, that possibility doesn't exist because we've subcontracted everything and our existing staff are stretched. So what I do when the young guys come through, is to get them to go out and use the QA system as a vehicle for learning. Doing audits is an excellent way of forcing them to go out on site and ask questions'.

Another commented ruefully: 'These days I have to say that the skills level of some of the operatives is suspect, even for the better contractors. So what the QA system does is to provide a basic list of operations and checks on what we require. Obviously, if the guy is any good, he'll have no problem. But those who aren't have to accept we'll keep checking up on them until we're satisfied they've got it right'.

For Weber, bureaucracy was the ultimate expression of rational organization. Activities are broken down into specialized areas of competence; organization is in the form of a hierarchical pyramid in which power flows down and information flows up; there is a clear career structure which allows the possibility of advancement up the pyramid. This view stands in clear contradiction to the widely held notion of bureaucratic organizations as inefficient and irrational. Bittner (1965) has pointed out that the rules of an organization are a normative version of the organization from the point of view of senior management. By taking the rules of the organization to be an objective account of

how the organization functions, Weber is thus adopting a senior management point of view. Bittner points out (p. 272) that: 'formal organizational designs are schemes of interpretation that competent and entitled users can invoke in yet unknown ways whenever it suits their purposes'. In other words, individuals in an organizational setting, rather than simply following the rules, will produce them as appropriate, in response to specific situations. At other times they will choose to ignore, suspend or 'bend' them as required.

Organization research has borne out this assertion. Zimmerman (1971), has pointed out that strict application of the rules would lead to organizational breakdown. It is sometimes necessary to break the rules in order to achieve the organizational aims which the rules are intended to achieve. This has long been recognized by trade unionists, who adopted 'work to rule' as a form of industrial action. Blau (1963), studying two US bureaucracies, observed no systematic attempt to adhere to rules. Procedures, again, were oriented towards the achievement of organizational goals.

The import of this research for management studies is that, since rules are open to interpretation, in order to change the way people behave it may be necessary to do more than just change the rules. It may be necessary to address the underlying assumptions by which those rules are interpreted. Our own research indicates that this is indeed the conclusion that many quality managers are coming to. They realize that rules may be used in many ways, as resources, as justifications, even as weapons. One gave us this account of third party QA audits: 'These people come in and do a paperwork check on you for what is usually quite a hefty fee and often for less than what I'd call a full day. They are only after administrative slip ups such as documents not dated or signed, for instance. This is not about real improvement by bringing people in the team together to problem solve. In my opinion outside bodies have no part to play in assisting this'.

A further problem with attempting to reduce quality to a set of rules is the danger that these will multiply endlessly. In conversations with quality managers about QA, this is a recurring theme. One told us: 'We did what we were told by our consultant and if we weren't sure about something, you put it into the system: this meant it had a procedure. The trouble was the manual was like a telephone directory – and about as appealing. The amount of paper in circulation multiplied to the extent where people on site spent more time dealing with QA than their proper job'.

Even worse, the potential disruptive effects of enforcing the rules are realized: 'The accreditation body visit is very disruptive. When we known they are coming its like having royalty for the day. You have to be on best behaviour and provide decent food. The people on site are told to say nothing more than is necessary. It puts us all on edge, because if we get a non-conformance, the contracts manager will go down there and find butts to kick. It makes it very difficult to go in and pick the pieces up and keep the teamwork spirit going'.

## The transition from writing procedures to changing the culture

The TQ philosophy which is now appearing among quality managers is radically different from the bureaucratic approach of QA. Essentially, it involves an attempt to improve quality, rather than to merely maintain an existing standard. This intention has far reaching implications, and it demands changes that go far deeper than a simple enforcement of rules: 'Total Quality is a process of change and no single change is more important than that of employees' attitudes. A shift in management style is necessary to allow change to happen' (Bell *et al.*, 1994, p. 130).

The change required of management style is in itself difficult to achieve, as we shall see, but even this is not sufficient. It is the need to alter attitudes, 'to capture hearts and minds', as another manager committed to TQ put it, which presents the greatest challenge. 'People do not necessarily resist change, but they may resist being changed . . . [They] need to feel included in the decision to change. Individual reservations, fears and concerns need to be accounted for'. This involves far more than simply changing the rules.

How are quality managers to effect the transition from QA to TQ? Despite the problems noted above, instituting QA was the relatively simple task of 'getting the plaque on the wall'. TQ, however, requires a radically different method of implementation, calling for different skills. It requires leadership qualities of drive, vision and confidence: the ability to lead by example, push through innovation and motivate often recalcitrant personnel, the traits associated with the charismatic leader.

All this presents severe problems for the quality managers, not least of which is whether they are, in fact well suited to the task of instituting TQ. One manager attempting the transition told us: 'If I had known what was involved, I would have run a mile. It's not that I don't think I can do it, but I've always done things in a quiet and methodical way. I'm not into all this trumpet blowing and self-congratulatory stuff: that's for them upstairs. I believe in teamwork, but I feel there is this expectation that I'll lead people by the nose'. Another expressed a more extreme view: 'Senior management don't see QA as being a crucial role. The consequence is that those given the task are

what I'd call the walking wounded. They are often people coming to retirement, are in between jobs ... That is the level of expectation that comes from above, people who don't have the guts to bring about real change'.

The quality managers interviewed for the study were not what might be described as 'hard men'. Perhaps those who appointed them were more shrewd than our informants generally gave them credit for. It may be that they knew that it would be difficult to institute BS5750 without the tacit support of the majority of personnel. The best way to achieve that would be to employ people who knew what went on and why and would introduce the system with tact and sensitivity. However, despite attempts to treat implementation with kid gloves, the manager charged with implementing BS5750 is often seen: 'as a policeman: someone who goes around making sure the rules of QA are adhered to and punishing breaches'. This presents a further difficulty for those who wish to make the transition to TQ. One manager, attempting to take this step, observed: 'My biggest problem is that people see me as having wielded the big stick once, when QA was implemented. This was a result of senior management having made it clear that QA was required and no resistance would be tolerated. Unfortunately – I did my best to lessen this perception that we were going around knocking people into shape, but I know our reputation was one of management lackeys. Now, when at least we've persuaded the top men of the need for a change of culture, our problem is to deal with the grass roots, who have long memories'.

Those advocating change often point to the dramatic improvements that have been achieved in other industries, most notably in manufacturing companies with a Japanese connection. But this evidence of the benefits to be gained most often proves less than persuasive: 'I tell people about other industries and I can see them itching to tell me that it's all very well, but this is construction and it's unique'. Many quality managers, attempting to implement TQ and faced with this kind of resistance, become despondent: 'the culture of this industry is such that whilst I know we must move away from being adversarial and continually at one another's throats, I am pessimistic about it happening'. These comments give an indication of the task facing any agent of change: the reluctance of those involved to believe that it is they who must contribute to bringing about progress.

Such obstacles are not insurmountable, however: 'I find the guys out there sceptical to start of with. They wonder why anyone should be bothered to ask their opinion. But once they realize there is no threat or hidden motive, it's really marvellous. They are enthusiastic to develop problem solving techniques and

methods of achieving the job which benefit both themselves and the company. For many, it's the first time anyone from the office has ever spoken to them'.

Even when change begins to occur, however, the frustrations of the quality manager are not at an end. One manager told us that he succeeded in developing a TQ culture on one site. This involved establishing regular meetings and educating those involved in how to run them effectively: to focus on problems, to identify solutions and to institute effective action. After an initial period, he was increasingly able to take a less directive role, until his presence ceased to be necessary altogether. The meetings, however, began to identify improvements which could be achieved only with senior management cooperation. Requests to senior management, however, have thus far failed to elicit action.

## The transition from legal rational to charismatic authority

Senior management was convinced that registration to BS5750 was essential to maintain business and stay on tender lists. Thus, it had to be achieved at all costs. Clearly, quality managers had a legal-rational legitimation for their task. With the transition to TQ, however, this authority is now in question: 'The problem I have is that they told me to get on with the job of putting in BS5750. That was all right because I just wrote procedures that were logical and fitted in with the standard. They never really got involved and to be quite honest, that's the way I preferred it. The trouble is that in putting in the basic Quality System, I relied on the goodwill and cooperation of the blokes at the bottom. The middle level managers went along with it, but often, I felt, because they didn't want to be seen to be stepping out of line. Now I believe it's time to move on and develop, but the top men think it's *my* job. Some middle men want to help, but say they haven't got time and the rest couldn't give a damn. Those who are most committed to TQ are the young blokes at the bottom, but it's hard to do things based only on them. Besides, even they get a bit disillusioned when they see how marginalized I've become'.

This comment is not atypical. Most of the quality managers who are attempting the transition to TQ believe that their efforts are given less importance than is necessary for their success. This is not a matter of increased status for the individual quality managers, however. The crux of the problem is contained in the phrase, 'the top men think it's my job'. Middle management, too, seems to think that quality is solely the quality manager's responsibility: 'some middle men want to help, but say they haven't got time'. This is in direct contradiction to a fundamental principle of

TQ: that quality is, in fact, the responsibility of every member of the company, but of none more so than those at the top.

This failure of commitment, especially at the top, is recognized by all quality managers and is a source of frustration to those attempting the transition to TQ. For example, one remarked: 'I think they find all this togetherness stuff a bit alien. It's not the way they came up through the industry. They think that once you're up there it's a matter of sitting in the boardroom taking tough financial decisions. I've tried to involve them a few times, but to be quite honest, their presence is counterproductive, people will clam up and you get no useful debate'. Another commented: 'I was talking to my boss telling him of the need to develop a business process approach. I could see his eyes glazing over. It was obvious that he hadn't a clue what I was talking about. What's worse is that they would never have the guts to ask for our explanation; that would be seen to be weak'. One final example is: '[the company directors] cannot agree among themselves on what we should do. How the hell am I supposed to go out and preach the message of unity of purpose?'.

What we see here is the failure of quality managers' authority to extend to the implementation of TQ. The legal rational authority vested in their office flows from two related sources: the recognized commercial necessity of achieving TQ and the granting of that authority by those entitled do so (senior management). Since the commercial necessity for TQ is not as widely recognized and senior management backing is not forthcoming, the question facing quality managers is: from where can they derive the authority for instituting TQ?

Weber's analysis provides for two other types of authority, traditional and charismatic. Traditional authority might seem to be inappropriate as a means of legitimizing radical change. However, it is possible to invoke traditional authority in this manner by representing the innovation as a return to customary practices which have fallen into disuse (Weber, 1947). The real obstacle to quality managers using traditional authority is that no apparent source of such authority is available to them.

This leaves charismatic leadership as their only alternative. In making this assertion, we are not, of course, claiming that the advocate of TQ must become a Margaret Thatcher, or a Martin Luther King. The personal qualities of such leaders are rarely found among us. What is necessary, is that they should find within themselves some qualities of leadership which will act as a source of authority. This is because they will not find such sources outside themselves, either in their own institutional position in the organization, or in any generally perceived legitimacy of the TQ philosophy.

## Research into leadership: the quest for the holy grail

It is not surprising that much effort has been dedicated to the search for what leadership is and how it can be used as an elixir for organizational well-being. But, as Handy (1985, p. 93) states: '... The search for the definitive solution to the leadership problem has proved to be another quest for the holy grail in organizational theory'. However, Thomas (1993) thinks that research contributed very little because (p. 109): 'Although it is a subject that has attracted a great deal of attention and which has spawned a voluminous literature, it remains one of the most confused areas in the whole field of management'. We will consider briefly approaches to leadership research under six broad headings: qualities or traits; functional or group; behavioural theories; styles; contingency models; and emergent approaches. Each represents a different way of defining what leadership consists of.

### Qualities or traits

This is simply the belief that leaders are born with the certain skills which makes them able to influence and lead others. The implication was that if you can spot these people early enough it is just a matter of putting them into a position of power and they will do the rest. But, according to Jennings (1961, p. 2): 'Fifty years of study have failed to produce one personality trait or set of qualities that can be used to discriminate between leaders and non-leaders'.

### Functional or group

This approach focuses on what a leader does (functions) and how he/she influences their followers (group). Here the implication is that the skills identified can be learned and developed in any person so inclined. The problem is that these skills are varied and highly dependent on the situation. For instance, Krech *et al.* (1962) identified fourteen functions. There are those who point out that although this approach will not provide a 'magical' solution, it does emphasize the importance of the group. Thus Adair (1979) developed the idea of action-centred leadership. This adopts the principle that leadership is dependent upon meeting three areas of need in the group: achievement of the common task; team maintenance; and individual needs.

### Behavioural theories

The emphasis of this approach is on the behaviour of leaders, the aim being to identify common critical determinants existent in leaders. The result would be

that training programmes could be developed to teach the requisite behavioural patterns. Two important studies associated with the behavioural approach are those by the Ohio State group (Stogdill and Coons, 1951) and the University of Michigan group (Kahn and Katz, 1960). Both concluded that there are two dimensions to leadership. Ohio distinguished between: 'initiating structure', or how the leader defines what is to be done and by whom; and 'consideration', or how the leader establishes credibility and trust. In a similar vein, Michigan argued that leaders are either employee centred or production centred. Critiques of these studies have accused them of oversimplifying and of giving insufficient attention to situational factors (Robbins, 1994).

## Styles

This approach is concerned with the effects of an identifiable style on those being led. Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) proposed a continuum which at its extremes is boss-centred (authoritarian) and employee-centred (democratic). They suggest that there are three forces in choosing the style which is most appropriate to a situation. These are: within the leaders themselves; within those who make up the group; and within the situation. Thus, leaders are expected to alter their style according to these forces.

## Contingency models

These arose out of a feeling that previous studies had concentrated overmuch on the leadership qualities, with insufficient attention to the situation in which individual leaders find themselves. Several models have been produced, each intended to provide practical 'tools' which managers can use. We chose to do a pilot study using one of these, the Fiedler 'leader-match' concept, in order to compare it with our own qualitative approach and to see if it could add anything to our research. The results of this pilot were not encouraging (publication planned).

## Emergent approaches

Our own research has led us in the direction of two emerging approaches, 'charismatic' and 'transactional versus transformational'. These stress that leaders need to be able to capture the imagination of followers. Our findings affirm the importance of Webb's (1995) observation that: 'The popular management texts on the cultural aspects of TQ concentrate on change at managerial levels, with top management expected to set the standards and be an example through their conduct [. . .] There is implicitly an attempt to redis-

cover charismatic leadership, and to retreat from the dominant rational bureaucratic mode'. These findings should be treated with some caution since, as Avolio and Bass (1985) remark: 'The purely charismatic [leader] may want followers to adopt the charismatic's world view and go no further; the transformational leader will attempt to instill in followers the ability to question not only established views but eventually those established by the leader'. In the next section we will see more clearly what this means in practice.

## Setting up a quality circle

Quality managers involved in TQ initiatives insist that leadership is essential to success. Furthermore, they have no difficulty in explaining what good leadership is. Descriptions include, 'ability to inspire', 'you have to earn the trust and respect of the guys out there', and 'listen to their problems and concerns, discuss how to deal with them and get consensus for solution'. On the other hand, 'you have to be able to adapt'. 'Sometimes it is necessary to use a big stick.'

More profoundly, our interviews revealed some actual processes by which TQ was achieved. In the following account, taken verbatim from an interview, three stages in the setting up of a quality circle can be detected. First is the initiation: 'You do have to be strong at first. You have to lead them by being a bit of a bully. They (site personnel) see you as interfering with the most important thing: getting the job done. So to start off with it is difficult to get them to turn up at all and if they do, to turn up on time. Further, often they are not prepared to think or be disciplined in the way they conduct themselves. Thus you have to use a bit of muscle to influence them to turn up. The best way is to tell them that non-attendance will be viewed in very poor light by senior management. This is usually enough but is not something that I seriously consider'. Second is the establishment of a quality culture in the meetings: 'Once I've got them there I stress the need for the meeting to be conducted according to rules. Thus I get them to agree that those who cannot be bothered to turn up on time are excluded, and they agree to locking the door. If this happens on the first occasion then those who are late are sufficiently embarrassed to not do it again. Further, it sends a message out that we as a group are serious and are not going to tolerate those who mess us about'.

'The first couple of months are the most difficult. Most people are used to being told what to do by those above. I stress that this is a group and every person is equal; thus they are all expected to contribute. There is always the question of who is the chairman and/or spokesman. On most occasions we have been involved

with the most senior member of staff on site assumes that they will take this role. Usually the rest of the group will go along with this on the assumption that this person will tell them what to do. I deliberately force them to accept a person for this leader role who is not the most senior. It is a symbolic gesture. I want to show that seniority counts for nothing in quality circles. It will annoy the person who expected to be leader but I want people to feel that they can be open and honest. They will not do this if they feel that the group is just an extension of the management hierarchy'.

'The next task is to organize the meetings. Again, it is difficult to get people who are not used to doing this to devise an agenda. Somebody has to be appointed to take the minutes. Action points need to be agreed, and there must be the expectation that those who are appointed to carry them through will indeed do so. This can take quite some time to get accepted. My influence is very high and I accept that leadership from me is essential. After some time the message starts to get through. They begin to realize that they can achieve things by doing simple exercises like using statistical techniques and tools to identify problems. They begin to have confidence in their ability. I get them to produce reports to senior management on site and at head office which tells what is being done and is required for the future'.

As this second stage progresses and the members of the quality circle become committed to the principles of TQ, the quality manager's role must change. 'This period can be problematic. Some can get the impression that they are about to solve every problem the company has. I intervene in order to get them to accept that they need to stick to a small number at a time. I also stress that over-enthusiasm can lead to disappointment. There tends to be a perception that it is the really big problems that must be solved first. Fair enough if they are capable of being solved by the group. But usually these will need more effort and expertise than the group has initially. I get them to concentrate on small things. These will be easy to influence and provide some quick victories. This is good for morale and gives enthusiasm to continue their efforts. On one site recently the group had flow-charted the process of dealing with enquiries for technical information within the company. As a rest they had been able to rationalize, and save nineteen minutes per query. They didn't think this was a particularly marvellous achievement until I pointed out that given that until we do things radically different we usually have hundreds if not thousands of enquiries. Thus this saving in time will be multiplied over the duration of this contract. The total saving will be enough to make up for all the time they spend in the meetings of the quality circle, notwithstanding any more solutions they come up with'.

Finally, with the circle established, the manager's job is complete. 'At this point I can usually start to ease myself out. The group will have enough ability to manage themselves. They do not need me to lead them any more, they can do it themselves. As someone asked me recently, aren't you worried that you will have nothing to do? I agreed that that is possible in the long term, but would thus mean I have been successful in my role as change agent, but that given the way we do things at the moment is not a situation that will occur in the near future!'

The necessity of this last stage confirms the comment by Avolio and Bass on the limitations and dangers of charismatic leadership. If the manager has not created a group with its own leadership dynamic, his withdrawal will lead to its collapse.

## Lighting bonfires – change from below

Finally, much of our material concerns the frustration which those quality managers attempting the transition to TQ feel, due to the lack of commitment shown by senior management. One told us: 'When I first started I thought that the job would be easy. The directors made lots of statements that quality was essential. They said every person had their role to play and that no-one could "cop out". I thought that this meant that they would give the commitment that they expected from everyone else. But the reality was [. . .] come the time for action and they made it clear that I was to get on with the job and not bother them. Oh, they did make it clear that if there were any employees who didn't give me their co-operation I was to let them know and they would deal with them. As you can appreciate this didn't get me off to a good start. TQ is about developing trust and improving relationships'.

Another manager, speaking in a similar vein, described senior management as being like dinosaurs, but that: 'They were wiped out by a sudden change in climate. That is what is needed in this industry, a dramatic change in the climate. By that I don't mean economically. No in a perverse way it needs to get harder, like it did in car manufacturing. There the top managers of the Western companies saw that the Japanese were able to produce a superior product at a cheaper price. The customer had a choice and took it. Western managers got off their backsides and learned that leadership is more sophisticated than union bashing and producing the same tired product year in, year out. The senior management in this industry haven't got the bottle to grasp this 'nettle'. They believe that if they stick with the old ways for long enough everything will be all right. I've tried to tell our directors that there is an alter-

native to adversarial management, but to be frank I don't think they believe me'.

Quality managers, then, if they are to institute TQ, must develop the confidence and enthusiasm which is necessary to move hearts and minds. One of our informants, who clearly possessed these qualities in abundance, described his strategy to us: 'Give everyone a hard time, especially those at the top. They won't like it at first, but its the only way in my opinion to start to show a positive outcome that can be measured. Once you start to do this and can demonstrate real benefit, people will soon become interested. Why wouldn't they? Nobody wants to be left out of something that is recognized as radical and innovative. What then happens is that you try to get the whole organization focused on this *esprit de corps* and working in a lively environment. It's simple stuff which the Japanese have demonstrated without any doubt. I've started quality circles on a couple of sites in the last year and those involved gave me a multitude of reasons why they wouldn't work, but I persevered and lo and behold, they have. I describe it as lighting bonfires. These will burn at the relatively low level of site, but shine like beacons for all to see – particularly at the most senior levels'.

## Recommendations

We have argued that the qualities necessary for the implementation of TQ are those of the charismatic leader, quite different from those required for the setting up of quality assurance systems. If the transition from QA to TQ is to be achieved successfully, quality managers must endeavour to develop these necessary qualities.

We have found three qualities among those managers who, in their own estimation and ours, are making headway in implementing TQ. One of these is adaptability. The successful TQ manager must be capable of providing inspirational leadership, but also of instituting attitudes and patterns of behaviour which are self-sustaining. Thus, the manager must know when it is appropriate to withdraw from an initiative. Avolio and Bass' (1985) concept of transformational leadership is pertinent here. In addition, the TQ leader must have developed appropriate techniques for quality improvement. Finally, neither adaptability nor technique can be effective without commitment. This last is the alpha and omega of TQ. Given commitment, then adaptability and technique may possibly be learned, without it they will come to nothing.

With regard to technique and adaptability, we have recorded an account of the setting up of a quality circle. It is intended that this should function as a practical

guide to quality managers contemplating the transition to TQ. It is, of course, only a sketchy account of one element of the integrated strategy necessary for the achievement of TQ. More research is needed urgently in this area.

Finally, we have addressed the thorny question of unhelpful attitudes among senior management. Given the universal insistence in the literature upon senior management commitment, this phenomenon bodes ill for TQ initiatives. Nevertheless, we have highlighted a strategy, change from below, by which it might be overcome.

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## Glossary

*Quality Assurance (QA)*. A system of procedures designed to sustain a check upon work processes to ensure that they are performed in a consistent manner, thus guaranteeing consistent quality in the end product. For the purposes of this paper, it may be regarded as synonymous with regis-trastion for BS5750 and/or ISO9000.

*Total Quality (TQ)*. A management philosophy which stresses the need for continual improvement of all work processes by committed and empowered workers.

*Quality Circle*. A small group meeting on a voluntary but regular basis to discuss problems and improvements in work processes.